

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**385**  
New cases in 24hrs



**546,216**  
Total cases



**8,408**  
Deaths



**496,924**  
Recoveries



**2,539,386**  
Deaths



**114,482,075**  
Total cases

GRADUATION FROM LDC STATUS

## We've to sustain the recognition: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government is committed to sustaining Bangladesh's recognition as a developing country through the expansion of education and building skilled workforce and worthy citizens.

"Bangladesh today is a developing country. We've to maintain the recognition we've got, and for that we need to expand our educational facilities, build a skilled workforce and worthy citizens," she said.

The PM said this while inaugurating a programme of distributing stipends, tuition fees and treatment grants among poor and meritorious students from the PM's Education Assistance Trust under the education ministry.

Hasina joined the event virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

She said the government is firmly committed to building skilled and worthy citizens. "To make Bangladesh free from poverty, education is needed most. We think, like the Father of the Nation, that spending on the education sector is not an expense at all. We do consider it as an investment and that's the investment for the future generation."

The PM said the government is setting up various universities across the country, considering the demand for the modern world.

Hasina mentioned that the government has established Maritime University and Aviation University, considering the requirement of a specific area.

She also mentioned that science and technology-based education along with vocational one is most needed as these could create employment opportunities both at home and abroad.

The PM said the government is setting up 100 special economic zones across the country where huge technical persons and skilled manpower will be needed as both local and foreign investments are coming there.

"We want to develop people as skilled manpower so that they can substantially contribute to economic



development of the country. We're taking steps keeping eyes on that," she said.

Regarding the higher number of female students than the male ones, Hasina asked teachers and guardians to find out the reason why the number of male students is falling.

She added that the government has decided to reopen educational institutions on March 30 and all the teachers and employees of the institutions will be vaccinated against Covid-19 by that time. "We've already directed the health ministry to get them vaccinated."

About the vaccine for college and university students, the PM said the government will ensure the vaccine for the students whose vaccination is not restricted by the World Health Organisation.

The PM also mentioned that nearly 1,500 poor students are getting financial assistance for their education every year from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust.

A total of 163,882 poor and meritorious students yesterday received stipends and other assistance for education and treatment through mobile phone and online banking system from the Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust.

Education Minister Dipu Moni, Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury and Secretary of Secondary and Higher Education Division Mahub Hossain also spoke on the occasion.



**Two building painters putting their lives at risk, hanging off a makeshift ladder without any safety harness. Such disregard for safety leads to injuries and deaths. The photo was taken from For's Lake area of Zakir Hossain road in Chattogram yesterday.**

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Hiss or boom?

FROM PAGE 1

And, it either can come through hisses or booms! Hiss is not a pleasant sound to hear. But, bear with it, you're certainly better-off. You're safe actually with the hisses.

Think of any family of ours. Don't we see demonstrations of disagreement, dissatisfaction, difference of opinions or perspectives, and contradictory approaches to situations? We argue, shout, fight and cry over any debatable issue. Together, we make a hiss before settling for a solution.

At a larger scale, a society or state is akin to a giant pressure cooker. It's absurd to have an all-agreeing population within a state. We all are different people, with difference of opinion, ambition and expression. People from different race, religion, age-group, political belief, financial background and school of thoughts make up the 17-crore population of Bangladesh. And, we all have the fundamental right to express ourselves. So, critical voices and dissenting views are only natural for those with power to expect.

Tension, commotion, disagreement and disgruntlement are bound to creep up while a state is being governed. So, the pressure starts to accumulate within the sealed state pot and push up the lid. And, it's time to let the steam go off with a hiss. This is how democracies accommodate dissents, take benefit from those and move on to survive.

But the process of hissing starts to choke in a situation when autocracies reign supreme or democracies slip into a crisis. It's not the case of Bangladesh

alone that the health of democracy is not well at all. Look around the world, we would see the recently-defeated Donald Trump in US, Boris Johnson in UK, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Xi Jinping in China, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Hun Sen in Cambodia or Narendra Modi in India. It's not a good time for free media and freedom of expression.

Hissing is a dissent, which is not appreciated by the people in corridors of power. They try to muzzle dissents with all the might they possess. With the help of new laws, technology and excuse of national security and image, they push down the lid on freedom of the press and freedom of expression. And, in the process, they successfully turn the giant state pressure cooker into a ticking bomb: ready to explode any time.

Over a decade, the space for dissent is gradually shrinking and the process of hissing being choked in Bangladesh. Voices from effective opposition political parties are no longer heard either on streets or in the parliament. The free media is made to work its way through a series of obstacles -- the Digital Security Act (DSA), defamation law, Official Secrets Act of 1923, unofficial gag order and the constant fear of being picked-up, before capturing the sound of hissing for the people. The traditionally-strong cultural or social activism lost its cause. The once-vibrant civil society chose to be mostly silent for fear of tongue-lashing from people in power or from lickers of their sandals. True, there are some hisses that

we still could hear in the social media space. Understandably, louder among the hisses come farther from Bangladesh, in the safety away from home. Within Bangladesh, social space users could realise by now that their freedom of expression may land them in jail without bail. The fate of Mushtaq Ahmed will now remain burnt in their brains, forever.

Picked up under DSA for barely letting out a hiss at government's handling of pandemic, the celebrated crocodile entrepreneur-turned-writer died in jail Thursday. In the last nine months in prison, the bohemian visionary might have expected the government to respect his freedom of expression or the legal system, despite having been denied bail six times, to come forward for upholding his right to express himself.

Mushtaq is now beyond justice and making any hiss. Picked up along with Mushtaq on similar charge of hissing in the social media, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore is now seriously ill and languishing in jail. A healthy photojournalist, Shaiful Islam Kajo, has found himself reduced to a crippled old man following his 53 days of quizzical disappearance and 237 days in jail.

With the sole bread-earner restricted mostly to bed, his family is now being forced to run around the corridors of court for the trial of a case filed under DSA.

With every such injustice and every such muzzling of dissent, pressure continues to build up within the "Cooke Bangladesh". Let it hiss, before it's too late for a hiss.

## 18 killed, 30 hurt in police

FROM PAGE 1

bloody smears on pavements, media images showed. One man died after being brought to a hospital with a bullet in the chest, said a doctor who asked not to be identified.

"Police and military forces have confronted peaceful demonstrations, using lethal force and less-than-lethal force that -- according to credible information received by the UN Human Rights Office -- has left at least 18 people dead and over 30 wounded," the UN human rights office said.

Myanmar has been in chaos since the army seized power and detained elected government leader Aung San Suu Kyi and much of her party leadership on February 1, alleging fraud in a November election her party won in a landslide.

The coup, which brought a halt to tentative steps towards democracy after nearly 50 years of military rule, has drawn hundreds of thousands onto the streets and the condemnation of Western countries.

Among the dead were three people

in Dawei in the south, politician Kyaw Min Htike told Reuters from the town.

The Myanmar Now media outlet reported two people had been killed in a protest in the second city of Mandalay. Security forces fired again later in the day and one woman was killed, Mandalay resident Sai Tun told Reuters.

"The medical team checked her and confirmed she didn't make it. She was shot in the head," Sai Tun said.

Police and the spokesman for the ruling military council did not respond to phone calls seeking comment.

The dead in Yangon included a teacher, Tin New Yee, who died after police swooped to disperse a teachers' protest with stun grenades, sending the crowd fleeing, her daughter and a fellow teacher said.

Police also hurled stun grenades outside a Yangon medical school, sending doctors and students in white lab coats scattering. A group called the Whitecoat Alliance of medics said more than 50 medical staff had been arrested.

## The Santal warrior

FROM PAGE 1

They fought in several places including Argarahaat in Shibganj upazila, Poragon and Amnura in Sadar upazila, and Daldali in Bholahat upazila until just before victory was declared.

Freedom fighter Serajul Islam, former publicity secretary of the Sadar upazila unit of the Muktiyoddha Sangsad, said he took part in several battles alongside Shyam in 1971.

Hingu Murmu, president of Uttarbanga Adibasi Parishad's central committee, said, "We are proud of him and his participation in the Liberation War is a source of pride for Santals and other ethnic communities."

Even though Shyam helped the country to a victory, the wheel of fortune has not yet turned for him personally. The Santal community in the Barind region continues to live in abject poverty.

Aside from his small monthly allowance as a freedom fighter, Shyam has had to work as a day labourer to provide for his family of nine. However, his deteriorating physical condition makes it difficult for him to move around now.

Of his three sons, two also work as day labourers in the fields, the dominant source of work in the area. Despite suffering ailments and living a poverty-stricken life, the war hero said all he wishes is that the country he helped liberate runs well and that social harmony is maintained.

When some Awami League leaders of his home district visited the refugee camp he was in at the time, he said he wished to join the Liberation War. As per their advice, he went to Malda's Dak Bunglow and got listed as a freedom fighter.

Shyam first trained at Gour Banga of Malda and then at Siliguri. At the end of his training, under sector 7, he went to the Mahadipur camp in Malda, near the Sonamasjid border.

In that camp, Shyam met Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir, under whose leadership he took part in the war.

## Police foil JCD protests

FROM PAGE 1

the government's move of cancelling the government's move of cancelling the gallantry award of late president Ziaur Rahman, the repeal of the Digital Security Act, and an investigation into the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in custody.

Nearly 500 leaders and activists of the party gathered there to hold a human chain. But police barred them from taking to the street, saying the party didn't take any permission to hold the programme.

The clash erupted around 11:00am when a group of Chhatra Dal leaders and activists tried to come out of the press club premises and sat on the road. Police charged baton on them to disperse them, witnesses said.

A group of Chhatra Dal men then took position inside press club and hurled brick chips at police, leading to a series of clashes that lasted for about 40 minutes.

At one point, police entered the press club premises to drive them away. Some Chhatra Dal men then came out of the press club and chased the policemen with sticks and brick chips. The activists also vandalised a police box in front of press club.

Police were seen firing tear gas shells targeting the Press Club. They charged batons on any protesters in their path.

During the clash, there was heavy traffic congestion on the road as movement of vehicles were halted for hours.

At least 40 people, including 30 JCD men, eight policemen and a TV cameraperson, were injured in the clash and took treatment at different hospitals.

Of them, 25 people, including three policemen, took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Sheikh Mamun, ATN Bangla senior cameraperson, was injured on his head.

Police detained nine Chhatra Dal men -- two from in front of the press club, two from the emergency unit and five others from outside the emergency unit at the DMCH.

However, Shahnewaz, a joint secretary of JCD, told The Daily Star that 16 of their activists were also detained at Shahbagh, Ramna, Paltan and Motijheel Police Stations.

"On Saturday, we announced to hold a human chain programme. But coming here in the morning, we saw 300-400 policemen. They didn't allow us to even stand," the JCD leader said.

Eventually, the protest was foiled before it could begin.

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir was supposed to join the rally. Besides, Dhaka Metropolitan South BNP president Habib-un-Nabi

Khan Sohail was present at the spot.

BNP spokesperson Imran Saleh Prince said 30 of their leaders and activists were injured in the clash, claiming some of their activists were missing.

"Our leaders and lawyers were not allowed to enter Shahbagh Police Station to know about the detainees," he said.

BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, at a programme at the Press Club, condemned the attack on JCD activists and alleged that the government was gagging people's voice using the police.

Sazzadur Rahma, deputy commissioner Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna division), told reporters that the DMP commissioner's permission is needed to hold such programme at any place of Dhaka city but Chhatra Dal did not take any permission from police.

"They took to the streets with 400-500 activists from inside the press club without permission and attacked the police. Bricks were thrown from inside the press club. Seven to eight policemen were injured in the incident."

He claimed the attack on police was pre-planned.

"They carried brick chips to the Press Club to carry out the attack. Legal action will be taken in this regard. Some people have been taken into custody," he said.

On May 6 last year, the Rapid Action Battalion arrested Mushtaq, 53, from his Dhaka home for "spreading rumours and carrying out anti-government activities".

Sued under the Digital Security Act, he had been in Kashimpur High Security Jail-3 in Gazipur since August 20.

On Thursday evening, he lost consciousness and was taken to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Mushtaq was critical, on social media, of the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the news of Mushtaq's death on Thursday night, people from all walks of life took to social media to vent their anger.

Protestors also took to the street demanding justice for the death of Mushtaq, scrapping of the DSA and the immediate release of all those imprisoned under the controversial law, including cartoonist Ahmed Kishore.

**PROTEST AT SHAHBAGH**

Speakers at a protest rally yesterday demanded a probe into the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed to find out real reasons behind the death.

## Over 31 lakh vaccinated for Covid-19

8 more die, 385 infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of people vaccinated crossed 30 lakh mark as the countrywide inoculation campaign entered 18th day yesterday.

With a total of 125,752 people vaccinated yesterday, the total number of people vaccinated has reached 31,10,525 according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services.

The countrywide mass inoculation campaign started on February 7.

Meanwhile, eight more people died from novel coronavirus in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said another press release from the DGHS.

With the latest fatalities, the total number of deaths has reached 8,408. The death rate was 1.54 percent.

At least 385 new infections were recorded in the same 24-hour period, taking the total number of infected people in the country to 546,216.

Against a total of 13,566 tests in those 24 hours, the positivity rate was 2.87 percent. The overall positivity rate now stands at 13.51 percent.

At least 817 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the same period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 496,924 and the recovery rate is 90.98 percent.

Among the eight deceased, six were males. One of the dead was aged between 31 and 40 years, one between 41 and 50, two between 51 and 60 and four were above 60 years, said the DGHS release.

As of 5:30pm yesterday, a total 4311,708 people have registered to get vaccines.

## Govt to make

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strategies and the roadmap.

The UNCDP is arguing for adoption of a host of international support measures in favour of the graduating least developed countries.

The UNCDP team will monitor the measures taken by the government and also give technical support for preparing the roadmap and strategies, mentioned the official.

The official also said they will take up some time-bound action plans to send the progress reports to the UNCDP every year so that it can monitor and evaluate the country's steps during the transition period.

The government has already submitted the country report on the transition period to the UNCDP, outlining its plans for the transition period.

In the report, the government said it is going to sign PTAs with Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Bangladesh has also been negotiating with Indonesia to sign the FTA soon to boost bilateral trade between the two countries and tap into export potential in the South East Asian region, the official pointed out.

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) has taken up a project titled "Support to Sustainable Graduation Project" to carry out the activities of the national taskforce and also provide it with secretarial support. The roadmap and strategies will be formulated under the project.

On Friday, the UNCDP, based on assessment, recommended the graduation of Bangladesh to a developing country from a least developed one.

Taking into consideration the Covid-19 fallout, the UNCDP for the first time extended the transition period for Bangladesh to five years from three years.

The UNCDP will also evaluate the country again in 2024 mainly to observe whether there is any setback in the economy or graduation.

At a virtual discussion yesterday, Debapriya Bhattacharya, a member of the UNCDP, said the committee has suggested that Bangladesh should prioritise areas in policy formulation to support its development during the transition period and beyond.

In a presentation, he also highlighted the major policies in which the UNCDP suggested collection of more tax, measures to increase private and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), creation of jobs, improvement of healthcare and the quality of education.

The UNCDP also suggested product diversification as the country is relying too much on garment items, said Debapriya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).